



Letter to the Editor

Comparing COVID-19 disease severity in patients with rheumatic and inflammatory diseases between the first and the subsequent waves



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Eight waves of the COVID-19 pandemic have occurred from spring 2020 to early 2023 [1]. It remains controversial whether patients with iRMD are at increased risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection and mortality [2,3]. This study is an update to our observational, multicenter, French national cohort study in patients with confirmed iRMD [4]. The objective is to determine whether COVID-19 disease severity and associated predictors differed from March 2020 to July 06, 2020 (first wave of COVID-19) with iRMD patients enrolled between July 06, 2020 and September 2021 (second, third, and fourth waves of COVID-19). All eligible patients/representatives were informed, and the study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of

Helsinki. Additional study details are in the [Supplemental Methods \(Doc S1\)](#).

We evaluated COVID-19 severity in 1973 patients with confirmed COVID-19. Clinical characteristics are in [Tables S1–S3](#), and were similar between pandemic waves. Associations between clinical characteristics, demographics, and rheumatic disease treatments with COVID-19 disease severity were not different according to COVID-19 waves ([Tables S4 and S5](#), interaction P -values > 0.05).

As previously [4], age and being female were identified as drivers of disease severity ([Table S6](#)). Age- and sex-adjusted analyses identified iRMD patients with traditional cardiovascular disease (CVD) comorbidities and auto-inflammatory diseases (aOR=3.09, 95% CI: 0.97–8.48) as more likely to develop severe disease than those with chronic inflammatory arthritis disease. Inflammatory disease activity was not associated with frequency of COVID-19 severity. Use of corticosteroids (aOR=3.00, 95% CI: 2.20–4.09) and rituximab (aOR=3.45, 95% CI: 2.14–5.55) was associated with severe disease, while use of the biologic TNF α blocker (aOR=0.29, 95% CI: 0.17–0.48) was predictive of less severe disease ([Table S7](#)).

Death was more frequent in older patients (aOR [≥ 75]=59.88, 95% CI: 25.65–139.76), patients with CVD comorbidities ($P < 0.05$ for all), and cancer (aOR=2.21, 95% CI: [1.09–4.47] [Table S8](#)). Evaluation of iRMD treatments and survival yielded results comparable to our first report ([Table S9](#)) [4]. Use of mycophenolate mofetil (aOR=10.17, 95% CI: 3.37–30.66) was strongly associated with death, and TNF α blocker use (aOR=0.28, 95% CI: 0.12–0.66)

Table 1
Multivariable analyses for disease severity.

Variable	Imputed analysis ^a (n = 1973)		Available case analysis (n = 1771)	
	n/N	OR [95%CI]	n/N	OR [95%CI]
Age (years)	222/1973	1.05 (1.03 to 1.07)*	199/1771	1.05 (1.03 to 1.06)*
Female gender	124/1316	0.49 (0.35 to 0.69)*	112/1176	0.50 (0.35 to 0.70)*
Interstitial lung disease	32/94	3.15 (1.87 to 5.30)*	32/89	3.41 (2.01 to 5.80)*
Diabetes	59/196	1.89 (1.26 to 2.84)**	53/179	1.87 (1.22 to 2.87)**
Obesity**				
< 30	149/1475	1.00 (ref.)	135/1335	1.00 (ref.)
30–39.9	60/430	1.51 (1.01 to 2.27)***	53/387	1.47 (0.99 to 2.20)
≥ 40	13/68	3.05 (1.32 to 7.06)**	11/49	3.40 (1.52 to 7.61)**
Hypertension	117/476	1.82 (1.29 to 2.59)*	106/435	1.87 (1.29 to 2.70)**
Corticosteroids	133/564	2.61 (1.87 to 3.63)*	122/518	2.69 (1.90 to 3.82)
TNF blocker	17/563	0.46 (0.27 to 0.80)**	13/503	0.39 (0.21 to 0.73)**
Rituximab	32/111	2.76 (1.66 to 4.58)*	31/108	2.82 (1.68 to 4.72)*

CI: confidence interval; OR: odds ratio; TNF: tumor necrosis factor. Odds ratio was calculated using multivariable logistic regression models, using a backward stepwise selection method, with patients with mild or moderate infection as reference. Only variables selected by the model are presented. Full model included age, sex, interstitial lung disease, coronary heart diseases, diabetes, BMI, hypertension, chronic renal failure, disease history, corticosteroids, methotrexate, mycophenolate mofetil/mycophenolic acid, TNF blocker and rituximab. n/N indicated the number of events/number of cases.

^a Odds ratio and P -value were calculated after multiple imputations ($m = 10$) to handle missing data.

* $P < 0.001$.

** $P < 0.01$.

*** $P < 0.05$.

Table 2
Multivariable analyses for hospitalization status.

Variable	Imputed analysis ^a (n = 1973)		Available case analysis (n = 1771)	
	n/N	OR [95%CI]	n/N	OR [95%CI]
Age	644/1973	1.05 (1.04 to 1.06)*	575/1771	1.05 (1.04 to 1.06)*
Female gender	400/1316	0.66 (0.52 to 0.85)*	358/1176	0.66 (0.51 to 0.86)**
Interstitial lung disease	62/94	2.93 (1.76 to 4.87)*	60/89	3.17 (1.87 to 5.38)*
Coronary heart diseases	123/183	1.50 (1.01 to 2.23)	112/167	1.54 (1.02 to 2.33)***
Stroke	37/56	2.17 (1.14 to 4.13)***	32/50	2.12 (1.09 to 4.15)***
Diabetes	123/196	1.95 (1.34 to 2.83)*	111/179	1.85 (1.26 to 2.74)**
Obesity***				
< 30	456/1475	1.00 (ref.)	407/1335	1.00 (ref.)
30–39.9	158/430	1.28 (0.97 to 1.68)	143/387	1.30 (0.97 to 1.73)
≥ 40	30/68	2.18 (1.10 to 4.33)***	25/49	2.44 (1.26 to 4.74)**
Hypertension	264/475	1.49 (1.13 to 1.97)**	243/435	1.60 (1.20 to 2.14)**
Chronic renal failure	69/93	2.12 (1.20 to 3.75)***	62/85	1.95 (1.08 to 3.52)***
Corticosteroids	311/564	2.39 (1.87 to 3.06)*	280/518	2.29 (1.77 to 2.97)*
Hydroxychloroquine	61/181	1.57 (1.05 to 2.34)***	57/167	1.69 (1.11 to 2.57)***
TNF α blocker	86/563	0.56 (0.42 to 0.76)*	78/503	0.60 (0.44 to 0.82)**
Anti-IL6	12/75	0.22 (0.11 to 0.45)*	11/67	0.26 (0.12 to 0.54)*
Rituximab	70/111	2.89 (1.81 to 4.62)*	68/108	3.14 (1.95 to 5.06)*
Anti-IL1	9/15	4.89 (1.40 to 17.13)***	8/13	5.44 (1.40 to 21.22)***

BMI: body mass index; CI: confidence interval; OR: odds ratio; TNF: tumor necrosis factor. Odds ratio was calculated using multivariable logistic regression models, using a backward stepwise selection method, with outpatients as reference. Only variables selected by the model are presented. Full model included age, sex, interstitial lung disease, coronary heart diseases, stroke, diabetes, obesity, hypertension, cancer, chronic renal failure, disease history, corticosteroids, NSAIDs, hydroxychloroquine, leflunomide, mycophenolate mofetil/mycophenolic acid, azathioprine, anti-TNF, anti-IL6, rituximab and anti-IL1. n/N indicated the number of events/number of cases.

^a Odds ratio and *P*-value were calculated after multiple imputations ($m = 10$) to handle missing data.

* $P < 0.001$.

** $P < 0.01$.

*** $P < 0.05$.

was associated with survival. Risks of hospitalization were similar (Tables S10 and S11).

Multivariable analyses for disease severity (Table 1) and hospitalization status (Table 2) identified age, frequency of interstitial lung disease, hypertension, BMI, use of corticosteroids or rituximab were associated with COVID-19 severity and increased risk of hospitalization. Being female and TNF α blocker use was protective of severe disease and lower risk of hospitalization ($P < 0.01$ for all), confirming initial results.

In our expanded cohort, we reaffirmed that age and comorbidities in patients with iRMD predicted COVID-19 severity and mortality throughout the waves of the COVID-19 pandemic in France. The profile of patients developing severe disease was unchanged after the first wave. Collectively, these data will aid physicians to make informed management decisions of COVID-19 risk in iRMD patients and reduce the frequency of COVID-19 disease severity. As such, these at-risk patients should still be eligible for booster vaccination, potential preventive treatments, and early antiviral treatment.

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Research data availability statement

All relevant anonymized patient-level data is available upon reasonable request to the corresponding authors.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbspin.2023.105605>.

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How Shing Koy Elsa, Saint-Priest-en-Jarez; Hua Charlotte, Nîmes; Hudry Christophe, Paris; Huguenel Serge, Sarrebourg; Jaccard Clara, Clermont-Ferrand; Jacquemier Jean-Michel, Cornebarrieu; Jamard Bénédicte, Toulouse; Jan Catherine, Bar-le-Duc; Jean Sylvie, Rennes; Joffres Laurie, Saint-Benoît; Jousse-Joulin Sandrine, Brest; Jouvray Mathieu, Arras; Juge Pierre-Antoine, Paris; Juillard Laurent, Lyon; Jullien Denis, Lyon; Kabchou Abdelkrim, Vichy; Karkowski Ludovic, Lyon; Karman Françoise, Pontault-Combault; Kemiche Farid, Pontoise; Keraen Jérôme, Quimper; Kieffer Pierre, Mulhouse; Kone-Paut Isabelle, Kremlin-Bicêtre; Koreichi Abdeldajallil, Lorient; Kostine Marie, Bordeaux; Krebs Stéphanie, Ploemeur; La Batide Alanore Sylvain, Paris; Lacombe Valentin, Angers; Lafforgue Pierre, Marseille; Lahalle Sophie, Paris; Lambert Marc, Lille; Lambrecht Isabelle, Reims; Lamer François, Rennes; Langlois Vincent, Le Havre; Lanot Sylvain, Alençon; Lanteri Aurélia, Antibes; Labre Jean-Paul, Pierre-Bénite; Latourte Augustin, Paris; Lavigne Christian, Angers; Le Gouellec Noémie, Valenciennes; Le Guen Guegan Sophie, Contamine-sur-Arve; Le Guenno Guillaume, Clermont-Ferrand; Lebrun Agnès, Paris; Ledoult Emmanuel, Tourcoing; Legoupil Nathalie, Paris; Legrand Erick, Angers; Leguy Diane, Roubaix; Leguy-Seguine Vanessa, Dijon; Leloire Olivier, Ronchin; Leroux Christophe, Dreux; Leroy Rémi, Dunkerque; Leroy-Gouix Marie, Vannes; Leske Charles, Cholet; Leturcq Tifenn, Paris; Leurs Amélie, Dunkerque; Leveque-Michaud Céline, Valence; Limbach François-Xavier, Saverne; Liote Frédéric, Paris; Lohse Anne, Trevenans; Lozac'h Pierre, Le Mans; Lucas Charlotte, Rennes; Mabrut Etienne, Pierre-Bénite; Madelon Aurélie, Grenoble; Magnol Marion, Toulouse; Magy-Bertrand Nadine, Besançon; Mahevas Matthieu, Créteil; Maillard Hélène, Lille; Maillot Thibault, Macon; Maillot François, Tours; Malochet-Guinamand Sandrine, Clermont-Ferrand; Mangon Quentin, Aurillac; Mankikian Julie, Tours; Marchou-Lopez Sylvie, Crolles; Margarit Nathalie, Portet-sur-Garonne; Marhadour Thierry, Brest; Maria Alexandre, Montpellier; Mariette Xavier, Kremlin-Bicêtre; Marotte Hubert, Saint-Priest-en-Jarez; Martin Claire, La Rochelle; Martin Thierry, Strasbourg; Mathian Alexis, Paris; Mathieu Sylvain, Clermont-Ferrand; Maurier François, Metz; Maury Frédéric, Beuvry; Mazet-Guillaume Betty, Angers; Mazouyez Arnaud, Contamine-sur-Arve; Mazyad Hassan, Poissy; Mehseu-Cetre Nadia, Bordeaux; Mekinian Arsène, Paris; Melki Isabelle, Paris; Meric Jean-Camille, Ales; Messer Laurent, Colmar; Michaud Martin, Toulouse; Michel Catherine, Mulhouse; Michel Matthias, Sangatte; Michon Mathilde, Courbevoie; Milesi-Lecat Anne-Marie, Vichy; Molto Anna, Paris; Moly Marie, Montpellier; Moranne Olivier, Nîmes; Morel Gautier, Valenciennes; Morel Hugo, Dijon; Morel Jacques, Montpellier; Morin Franck, Saint-Pierre-de-Coutances; Moulinier Laurence, Paris; Moulis Guillaume, Toulouse; Moura Bertrand, Paris; Naude Claudine, Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne; Nguyen Minh, Paris; 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Quenet Marion, Saint-Brieuc; Queyrel Viviane, Nice; Raffray Loïc, Saint-Denis; Razanamahery

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Odile, Poitiers; Sourisseau-Diverres Gaëlle, Gujan-Mestras; Sparsa Lætitia, Mulhouse; Spielmann Lionel, Colmar; Stavris Chloé, Marseille; Steib Sarah, Marseille; Straus Catherine, Élancourt; Strotz Victor, Antony; Szafors Paulina, Montpellier; Taffignon-Clave Séverine, Écully; Talmud Déborah, Orléans; Taraud Chloé, Niort; Tenenbaum Nora, Paris; Theillac Claire, Pierre-Bénite; Thomachot Benoît, Gardanne; Thomas Thierry, Saint-Priest-en-Jarez; Tieulie Nathalie, Nice; Tiriau Soizic, Nantes; Tison Alice, Bordeaux; Tournadre Anne, Clermont-Ferrand; Toussiroit Eric, Besançon; Trefond Ludovic, Clermont-Ferrand; Trijau Sophie, Marseille; Trouillier Sébastien, Aurillac; Trouvin Anne-Priscille, Paris; Truchetet Marie-Elise, Bordeaux; Uettwiller Florence, Tours; Ulrich Marc, Valenciennes; Uzunhan Yurdagul, Bobigny; Valls-Bellec Isabelle, Brest; Vaquier Jacques, Limoges; Veillard Eric, Saint-Malo; Veillon Laurent, Orléans; Vial Guillaume, Bordeaux; Viillard Jean-François, Bordeaux; Victor Judith, Bordeaux; Vidon Claire, Aix-les-Bains; Vidon Mathias, Créteil; Vigne Camille, Pierre-Bénite; Virone Alexandre, Kremlin-Bicêtre; Warzocha Ursula, Bobigny; Wendling Daniel, Besançon; Werle Claude, Haguenau; Wibaux Cécile, Seclin; Wisniewski Michel, Saint-Amand-les-Eaux; Woessner Juliette, Avignon; Xerri-Campano Bernadette, Saint-Maur-des-Fosses.

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